



2021 Holiday Season
Shopping Trends:

How Brands Can Respond



Almost nothing has done more to accelerate the growth of ecommerce than the COVID-19 pandemic. Shoppers have become increasingly comfortable purchasing everything from clothing to groceries online.

As online shopping becomes more commonplace, the preferences and expectations of shoppers are changing in ways that will significantly impact major shopping events, like Black Friday.

Based on the results of our January 2021 [survey](#) of American shoppers, we've developed key action steps for ecommerce leaders to take that will help them adapt to current consumer preferences in advance of the holidays. Consumers are prioritizing instant, to-the-point messaging they can receive in the palms of their hands — here's the data to support that and how you can serve this growing need.

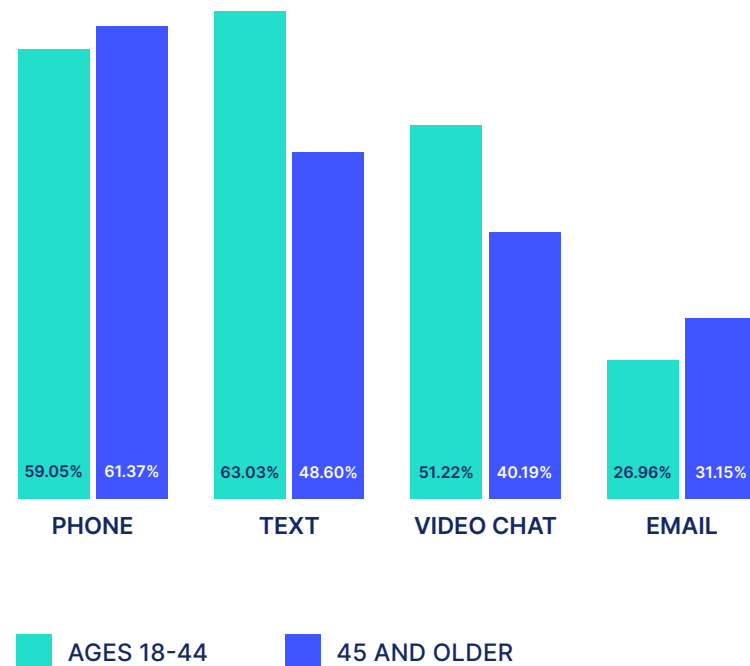


Get personal

Text messaging is the number one communication channel for people under 44. Need proof? Statistics show 63% of survey respondents in that age group planned to use text messaging as the primary way to get in touch with the people they love. Did you ever think you would see a time when people preferred to text their loved one rather than call them? Well, that time is here. (By the way, it's not just the younger generation who are following this trend, texting was also a top choice for those older than 44. Nearly one out of two (48.60%) respondents over the age of 44 said they planned to use a text message to reach out to someone they love on Valentine's Day.)

Text messaging is the number one way most people communicate important messages. If your organization has something important to say, why wouldn't you take advantage of this channel?

Question: How do you plan to let the people you care about in your life know you're thinking of them this Valentine's Day?



Next steps

The message is clear: Texting is the way to reach people with messages that matter. People are already organically using text messages to send the most important communications with the people they love. What does this mean for brands? Here's how to craft a text messaging strategy with the knowledge that this communication channel is the most personal one around.



White-gloved communication:

If a customer has given you their number and consented to receiving text messages from you, they're placing you in a very personal category. Treat this with the utmost respect. Know that your messages will be read.



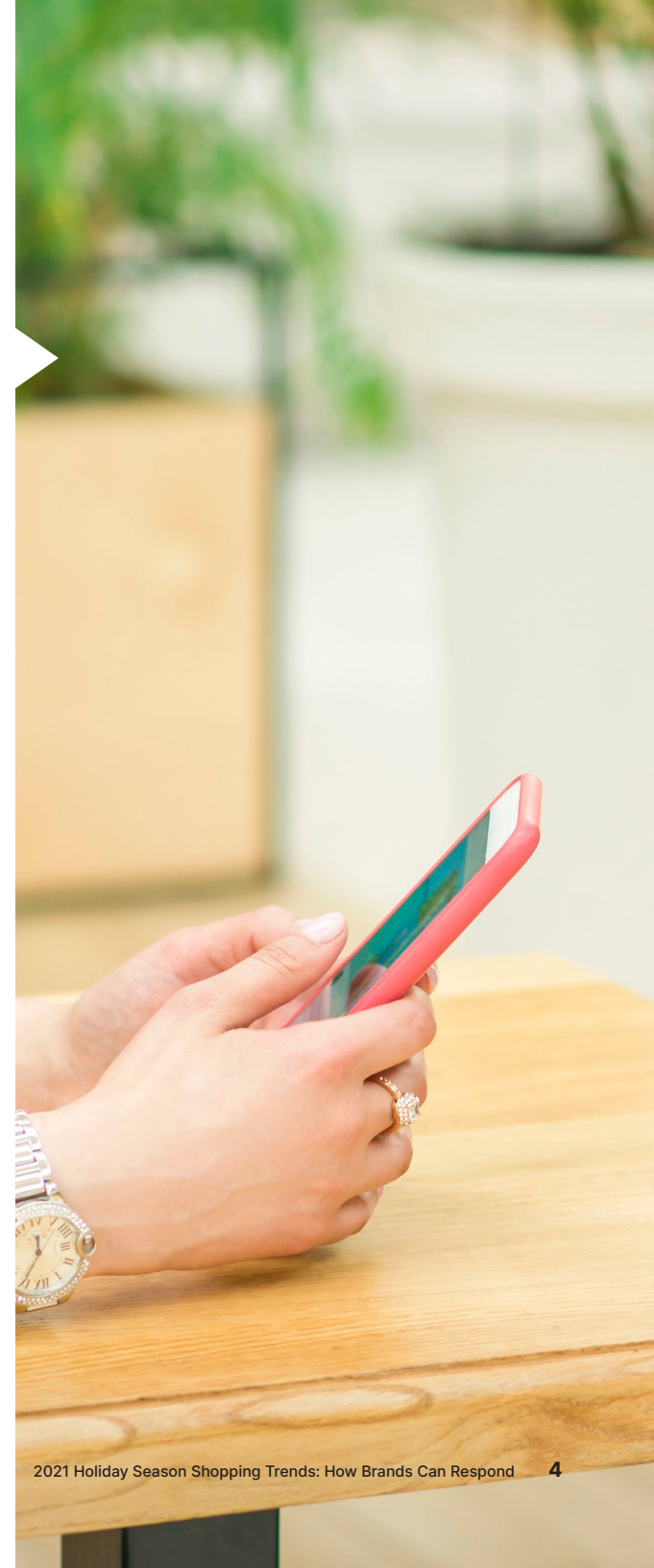
Provide value:

Send only the most valuable messages through text, with exclusive offers or other ways of directly benefiting your customers.



Start texting now:

If you don't already have a text marketing plan in place, now is the time to start. It's clear that people of all ages place a huge importance on text messaging as their preferred communication method. If you're neglecting this channel in your technology stack, you're likely neglecting the preferences of a majority of your customers where they're at - on their mobile phone.

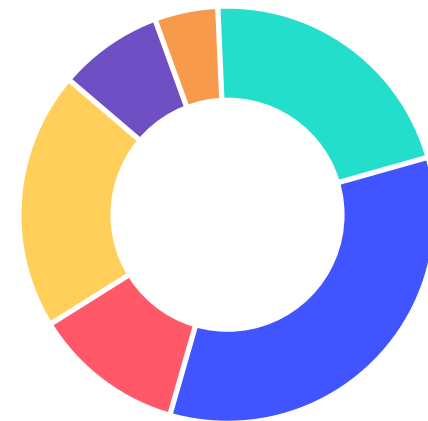


Adjust to consumer interest

Digital gifts and experiences are out, physical gifts are in as 33.64% of survey respondents said the majority of their spending for Valentine's Day, the biggest holiday in Q1 2021, would go toward dinner plans while 20.82% said they would spend big on candy or chocolate. An additional 20.45% said they would buy other physical products.

If you've been pivoting toward online events or experiences during the pandemic, now might be a time to consider how to boost your offering of physical products as survey respondents indicate they are deprioritizing digital experiences.

Question: What do you expect to spend the most money on this Valentine's Day?



DINNER	33.64%
CANDY OR CHOCOLATE	20.82%
OTHER PHYSICAL GIFTS	20.45%
FLOWERS	11.55%
DIGITAL GIFTS	6.82%
EXPERIENCES	6.73%



Next steps

Recognizing the appetite for physical products, reassess your offerings, supply chain and communication approach. Not only should you be asking how you can provide physical products for purchase, but how you'll ship them in a timely manner, all while communicating with your customer along the way. Ask your team these questions:

- ✓ Is your online store optimized so customers can easily complete the order process?
- ✓ Do you have an effective method for enticing customers to complete the order process after they have abandoned their cart? Remember, strong abandoned cart messaging can increase your recovery rate to as high as [58%](#).
- ✓ How can you optimize communications with your warehouse staff to quickly troubleshoot any issues and keep them updated on product changes, particularly as social distancing requirements continue to change?
- ✓ Do you have a clear communications strategy for providing shipping updates to your customers? As you'll see below, accurate shipping updates are one of the highest priorities for consumers in 2021.

Win loyalty by supporting local

Supporting local is a priority amongst all age groups, who indicated they would be turning to local stores over box stores and even online retailers for gifts. Big brands and ecommerce stores looking to support this trend can do so by highlighting their connection to and support of local businesses in their supply chain and charitable efforts.

Question: How do you prefer to purchase gifts this Valentine's Day?



LOCAL BUSINESSES	45.64%
ONLINE RETAILERS	37.64%
BOX STORES	16.73%



Next steps

Whether you're a local business or a major brand there are ways to support the growing sentiment for shopping local.



Local businesses — Optimize your shopping experience:

It's clear that consumers want to support local so make it as easy as possible for them by optimizing your online shopping and curbside pickup or delivery process. Take special care to make sure your online store works well on mobile, since this is where the majority of people plan to do their shopping. Find a simple, impactful solution for keeping shoppers informed of their order status (hint: text messaging is great for this).



Major brands and ecommerce retailers — Show support for local:

Highlight the ways your brand does support local, whether that's in your supply chain or through charitable efforts. Consumers should feel that their purchase decision with you does double duty by helping them get the products they love and putting money back into their local economy.

Optimize your mobile shopping strategy

People. Are. Glued. To. Their. Phones. For more evidence we present to you this stat: Nearly one in two survey respondents (47.27%) said they planned to purchase gifts via smartphone. It's not just youngsters who preferred mobile payments. Smartphone shopping led the way for consumers ages 54 and up, with a majority, 37.71%, indicating this would be their primary method of online shopping.

Question: How do you plan to make online purchases?

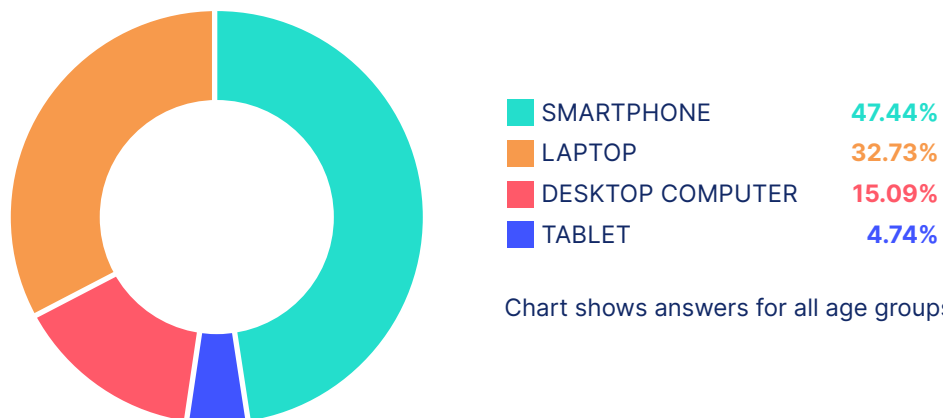


Chart shows answers for all age groups.



Next steps

With nearly half of all shoppers purchasing exclusively via their phone, marketers need to think strategically about how to upgrade their mobile communications strategy and reduce friction in the mobile purchasing process. Here are some best practices to integrate:



Sync your software:

Use mobile messaging platforms that integrate seamlessly with your online store (Shopify or otherwise).



Make it simple:

Include a link directly to your online store in your text messages so customers can purchase without ever having to put down their phones.



Send mobile abandoned cart notifications:

Since customers prefer to purchase using their smartphone, abandoned cart notifications should be sent directly to their phones via text messages— you can include a link directly to their pending shopping cart to reduce friction.

Prioritize accurate and timely communication

Respondents were asked to rank in terms of priority the most important aspect of their online shopping experience. Accurate shipping updates were the top concern, followed by an easy check out experience in the number two spot and discounts in third. After separating the results by gender, accurate shipping updates were the highest concern for female respondents of the survey while men had slightly different priorities (we'll get to those below).

Question: What is the most important aspect of your online Valentine's Day shopping experience during COVID-19?



Answers were ranked in order of preference.

Next steps

Retailers both large and small need to prioritize order status communications, especially as shipping times have proven to be inconsistent throughout 2021. Here's how:



Provide clarity:

Let customers know when they can expect to hear from you throughout the process. Touchpoints could include: when their order is received, when it is filled, when it ships and shipping estimates along the way. Your messaging software should integrate with your order management software to automate these communications.



Offer options:

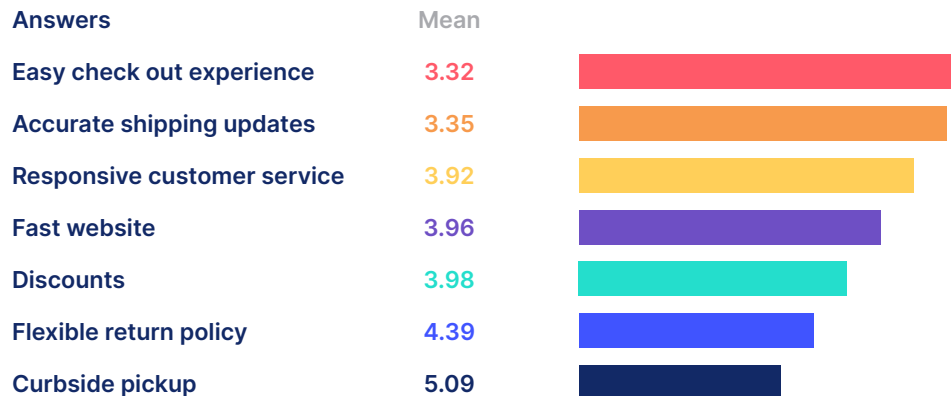
Allow customers to decide how they want to be contacted with updates about their order — email, text message or both. While email has long been the traditional method for communicating with updates, it's clear that text messaging is becoming the new go-to. Giving your customers a choice shows you value their preference and time, and that you're committed to robust communication.



Reduce friction

When we isolated the male and female responses to the question “What is the most important aspect of your ONLINE Valentine’s Day shopping experience during COVID-19?” we noticed a difference — male respondents rated the checkout experience as their top priority, followed by accurate shipping updates. Reduced friction during checkout is important for female shoppers too, they rated it as their second most important priority when choosing where to shop online. We believe this data will hold true as we head into the 2021 holiday season.

Question: What is the most important aspect of your online Valentine’s Day shopping experience during COVID-19?



Answers were ranked in order of preference. Results in table show answers from male respondents.

Next steps

Respondents of both genders prioritized an easy check out experience as one of the most important aspects of online shopping. A slow or tedious checkout process is a leading cause of abandoned carts, which can have a major impact on your revenue. Here's how you can look to improving your check out experience to reduce abandoned carts:



Reduce page load times:

Shoppers are impatient and when checkout pages are slow to load it gives them a prime excuse to abandon their carts. Avoid this outcome by optimizing on-page technical elements. Start by using smaller images and reduce social plug-ins that could be causing your page to load slowly.



Send an abandoned cart text:

Recapture the interest of shoppers who have already abandoned their cart by sending a text with a link that takes them directly back to their cart. Some marketers also include a promotion in this text message to increase the chances a customer will come back to complete their order.



Be clear about shipping costs and process:

Letting your customers know how much shipping will cost and how they can track their shipping is an important part of winning their confidence and compelling them to complete their order. Allow customers to sign up for text shipping updates directly in the checkout process so you can build their trust before they have a chance to second-guess you and abandon their cart.

Bottom line

Customer online shopping preferences are evolving — partially in response to specific COVID-19 influences, like shipping delays, and partially due to the growing comfort with online shopping for customers of all ages. Understanding where customers are now, and how they're evolving, can help you craft an ecommerce strategy that wins you more customers and increases your revenue.

Let us help you put these insights to work. Visit slicktext.com to select the plan that is right for your organization.

